

**M**OHAMMED Kibria's exhibition at 'La Galerie' showed once again the artist's expertise over non-representational forms. He has been experimenting for years now, on the possibilities of expressing the two-dimensional forms and compositions.

Normally such paintings tend to be decorative but Mohammed Kibria is undoubtedly sombre, emotional and expressive. At times his works might appear to be experiments with techniques but because of his empathy with his materials he is conscious of his forms which makes him one of our leading artists.

Kibria, like all modern artists, uses colours for their own value and identity—to express life and sensibility. For him a colour is not a pigment alone but something symbolic with life, vibrancy and strength of its own. In modern art, it is believed that colours are the very substance of the forms. He has used blocks and patches of rough patterns to create a harmony of sombre colours. It is believed that he was influenced by the European artist Mark Rothko, who used horizontal patches of a single colour with different strengths.

Kibria had been in Japan for training in graphics, and in Japan the technique of engraving has been carried to a mar-

## Sombre, Emotional and Expressive

by Fayza Haq

vellous perfection. His parallel lines and undulating shapes created effective and unforgettable images while his graphic training affect his textures.

Painting No 17 was a buoyant abstract creation like the rest of the artist's work. The oil had massive browns, whites and ochre, with bold and supremely confident play of texture. Barbed wires and nails appeared occasionally, as if to hold the piece together.

No 19 was a creation in steely blue with texture work like lace patterns in the main body of the work. Yellow ochre had been added to lend interest. Two dark patches in the centre arrested one's attention if nothing else did.

No 1 was an ambitious cre-

ation in soft, ethereal dabs of ochre and orange. There was a dark focal vertical line somewhere towards the centre, while the textures in the yellow ochre portion created wild images in your fancy—of dragons, problems or simply the mundane earthiness, the orange and white grey texture work added firmness to the work.

No 3 had bars of white, grey and blue, with detailed texture work in white and black. The painting could have been bars of clouds or simply a cemented wall with splashes of colours put on at random. It was both soothing and pulsating as the greys, blues and

whites appeared full of joy and life.

No 23 appeared like pure acrylic painting in black and grey patches from afar. As you approached it and examined it, you realised it was a collage as well. The bars, lines, wriggling strokes and splashes created a wonderful imaginative piece in shades of grey. They could have been clouds or a section of a frothing ocean.

No 9 was a soft creation in blues, greys and whites. You were fascinated by how the layers upon layers of simple colour could create such a wonder, mystery and magic in your mind.

No 18 had blues, whites, and greys again, in a bold creation, which had symmetry de-

spite apparent wild playing with colours. No 16 was an oblong creation with squares of yellow ochre juxtaposed with another one of orange. The brilliant squares were held together by splashes of vibrant grey. The texture work was subtle, imaginative and tranquillising.

No 8 was a combination of pinks, beige and shades of greys, with squares and rectangles, one gliding into the other. Once again the detailed textured abstract work on the body of the entire composition arrested the attention of the viewer.

No 14 was a solid expanse facing you, with tones of blue and brown worked into it. The mass of grey was relieved by a bar of white brown and ochre band running through the middle of the work.

The texture work in No 10, which was a blue, grey, black and brown creation, with highlights here and there, and minute detailed work throughout the whole body was peaceful and harmonious.

Splashes of grey and black acrylic paint on white were found in No 24, along with a few dots on the white background.

Through the use of colours and lines, without having in mind anything else, Kibria had presented his modern creations as visual experiences.

## Transports of Joy

by Arjuna

**Y**OU read a lot in the newspapers about the car industry, which swings around from boom to gloom and back again.

However, most of the world doesn't own a car. It doesn't even ride in one. Most of the world climbs aboard a bus or pedals a bike, or uses one of a dozen kinds of other vehicles.

And thereby hangs a very fine piece of research, done by someone called Michael Replogle, published by the World Bank. I would like to meet him one day, and swap vamps. The title of his great work is "Non-motorised Vehicles in Asian Cities."

It brings out the colourful (and sometimes crazy) traffic scene in Asia which has the most varied array of vehicles imaginable.

Stand, for instance, on any corner of Colombo's Galle Road as the traffic weaves through the suburb of Kollupitiya. You will see at least nine modes of transport, from bullock carts to container-rigs!

At one time, the government marked the road out into speed-lanes—bullock carts on the outside, four-wheel motors down the middle. It worked well, but not the way the authorities intended. The fast motorist took to the bullock-lane, because it was usually clear of traffic, whereas the center lane was crowded with trucks.

Or go to Bangladesh. The country has 24,000 buses and trucks, but it has 698,000 cycle rickshaws. Cars? Very few.

The cycle rickshaw is, in fact, the vehicle in Asia—India has 1,700,000, China probably 500,000 and Indonesia 200,000. Overall, there must be well over 3 million of these pedal-pushed vehicles, nearly as many as all the motor vehicles combined.

First of all, no matter how you fill your long list of conditionalities and then you say industrialization will deliver the goods, how many jobs will you create? Figure that out. For each job you have to invest at least a million taka. The more sophisticated it gets it will be even higher. But where is the number of people without jobs?

Everyone now talks about poverty alleviation. But what item is alleviated? The question is: at the end of December 1992, how many people will come out of this poverty.

DS: It is very difficult to explain poverty alleviation. What if say I employ 5 people—who had no jobs. Am I contributing to poverty alleviation?

MY: It depends on who they are. Do they represent the bottom 50%? Landless population in the country is over 60%. These people are talking of come from families who have 2-3 bighas of land. There are people poorer than them. So if you have drawn the line at 50% then no, you have not reached those 50%.

DS: But there is the fact that unemployment at the mid level does put a pressure on the bottom 50%, and the bottom 50% and mid level overlap.

I do not believe that 70% of all the grants and loans over the past 20 years have been all spent on donor countries and we have not achieved anything other than the remaining 20%. So what is the yardstick?

MY: I will reverse the question. Which one of the projects you have seen in Bangladesh for the last 21 years you think has contributed to the poverty alleviation? Just name one.

DS: What about electricity in rural areas? It has helped your borrowers for example, to work at night.

MY: These are all make believe stories. You cannot pinpoint anything. You say that it helps our borrowers work at night. You have no idea about our borrowers. They don't even have homes. Forget about the electricity. You see we don't understand what poor people are, what poverty is.

If you build up on that bottom 50 per cent all the sick industries will come to life again because people will be buying things. You know cosmetics has become such a big thing because of the garment industry. All these girls working in the factories wanted to wear lipstick so you had to produce a cheap lipstick and advertise it.

DS: Would you like to tell us about your other projects such as your housing and fisheries project?

MY: On the housing side we've recognized that it is very important for poor people to have houses. This is a new loan activity. First we proposed a loan of 5000 taka so that people can have a tin roof over their heads. We were opposed by housing experts because they were saying that it does not add to the housing stock.

Anyway, we succeeded in getting a loan from Bangladesh Bank for our borrowers. We made it to 7500 taka loan to complete a tin roof. Over time

pedals. Pedal-power, of course, is not the only means of getting around Asia. The region, in fact, is rich in small motorised vehicles, and of these my fondest memories are of Delhi's 'phut-phut-kah', a motor-cycle and covered side-car. The capital's taxis were not always reliable, whereas a phut-phut-kah would take you anywhere for half the price and in half the time, too.

The mini-motorcycle was invented in Italy and called the Vespa (Italian for 'wasp'). It was imported into India, where the Bajaj brand took over. Now more of the machines are ridden there than anywhere on the globe.

They helped forward a revolution in the labour force, in fact. In newly industrialising cities like Poona and Bangalore and Kota, young ladies can be seen riding them to work, their saris streaming in the breeze. Thus there has arisen a new breed of independent young businesswomen, previously thought to be impossible in Indian society.

—Depthnews Asia



Dhaka street scene

—Sketch by: Jeremy Trayner

## Conversation

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Rotary club has many rituals you don't notice them. Grameen Bank, all said and done, is a lot of defiance. We defy things. To begin with, we defied the banking system. Then we defied the relationship between man and woman the way it existed in the village. Women are not supposed to speak loudly, but one of Grameen Bank's requirements is that you should shout slogans so that the whole village can hear you. Slogans. Physical exercises are part of Grameen Bank rituals. Village women are shy and they are usually unable to talk to you in an audible voice they can not look you in the face. So we said we are like your brothers, look at us and talk person to person. Their salam has actually become a salute. Grameen members have to talk face to face and look straight into your eyes and talk. It gives you a distinction. If a little boy gives you a salute you know that he belongs to a Grameen Bank family.

Self respect, a sense of identity, has been denied to poor people. We want to bring that back to them.

That sense I belong to a community, that I am a success, because from very childhood a poor person is told that he is a failure, especially for the woman, who is brought up thinking herself as a bad woman or cause of misfortune for the family. We try to help her demonstrate that is somebody.

Sixteen decisions actually came from all those workshops. They go through lots of discussions and problems.

The first time in '82 in Madhupur I was summarising all the issues or problems they were discussing, suggestions and ideas, throughout the week. Then we wrote them down and made copies gave each one a copy so that they remember. These became popularly known as 10 decisions of Madhupur workshop. Then in '84 when we were having national workshops in Joydepur, they added more. There was a long list. People can not remember long lists. So I just stopped at sixteen. We always start with our slogan—okya, karma srinkhala amader path chala. They were then known as the 16 decisions adopted at Joydepur workshop. This establishes solidarity.

Gradually they became so popular that they memorized it. The list was getting longer and I said people won't read and remember them, so keep it short. They don't read and write, to read these we have to keep someone who can read and this is a big hassle. We have slogans like we will not line in broken huts, we will report them, we will not give dowry or ask for dowry etc. At first this became popularly known as the 10 decisions of Madhupur workshop. Later more were added and I said let's keep it at 16 since it will be easier to remember.

DS: I would like to have your views on the development process in a developing country. We have seen the success story of Grameen Bank. You have seen the various phases of development in Bangladesh. Over the last 20 years, from state ownership, privatization, how would you like to put your views about a development process that will help Bangladesh.

First of all my feeling is that we do not understand what we mean by development process even though we liberally use the term. It means different things to different people. To me 'development' is changing the life of the bottom 50% in a positive way. So I try to evalu-

ate any development project according to that yardstick. If you say we are building a huge highway from Dinajpur to Dhaka and this is our development project, my question will be—does it positively impact the bottom 50%? If it does it is a development project; if it has zero contribution I would not call it a development project. If it has a negative impact on the bottom 50%, which it may, I will call it an anti development project. So if you are building a dam, a bridge, a power station—whatever, my first test is does it change the lives of the bottom 50% in a positive way? The contribution to that would be the coefficient of my selecting or not selecting one project over the other. If I have two projects both of which fall under this definition but I can finance only one, I will see which one has a greater contribution to that section of the population. Most of the projects we see in Bangladesh do not do this. This is because

from the very beginning we have not defined it that way. So this is a very important thing for a country like Bangladesh.

If you look for example, just the foreign income component in the last 21 years we have received 25 billion dollars. With that 25 billion dollars we have not put any positive imprint on the faces of the bottom 50%. If there is an imprint it is a negative one. The question is then why did we need that 25 billion dollars? For whose benefit? And then, if you really wanted to make use of this one simple and crude way perhaps, is just take the 2.2 billion dollars this year 1992. That's a lot of money. If we just take that from Paris meetings and if we promise that it will reach the people and make sure it does then the safest way is to write a check to every poor family of the bottom 50 percent. I think every poor family can have a 500 taka check every month with 2.2 billion dollars.

DS: But you wouldn't be building bridges and roads.

MY: Well do we need that? You see, we have defined that 'whatever affects the poor people's lives in a positive way' is development. Building a bridge is not development, building roads is not development. We have to agree that changing the lives of the bottom 50% is development. Now say I have a case. I can build a bridge with say, 500 taka or I can give cash 500 taka. I will take the one that directly and immediately impacts peoples lives so I'll say I'll take the 500 taka.

DS: So what will you do with the 500 taka?

MY: I'll buy a goat, or a cow; I'll do something. This 500 taka could be a Grameen Bank loan. And who wants the bridge? Probably the bridge actually kills me because I used to ply the boat and be a boat man crossing people. Now the bridge has taken away my livelihood.

So this is the way I would like to look at it. Maybe the bridge is good for me. But bridge per say does not make a development project. If say, you are building an international airport and call it a development project first you have to tell me why you are calling it that, how many people are being affected and who they are.

You are familiar with the BIDS (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies) study by Rehman Sobhan and Hashem. Where did all the 25 billion dollars go? Seventy five per cent of the money was never spent in this country. It was spent in the donor countries

on the consultants, experts, all the missions they have sent and the products they have sold you. Only twenty five per cent of the money was spent in this country. It went to the local consultants, engineers, contractors and officials. So now, how are you going to say that this is the development we got with this 25 billion dollars? For whose benefit have you used this 25 billion? My first request is, let's sit down and find out what we are talking about, what is this development that we ought to change but we don't because it benefits me and you? We almost feel that if its good for me its good for the country.

DS: Well, I might say that if you build a road and create the facility for the villagers to bring their goods from one place to another and a bridge over which they walk, then in the long run, I am also changing the bottom 50%, because the villager will be bringing his chicken from Tongi and selling it in Dhaka at a better

DS: A job per se is not. But when I set up a paper mill in Khulna and produce this paper I am able to give jobs to 15,000 people. Shall I do without it? And just give 500 taka per person and not have the Khulna paper mill?

MY: I am glad you ask this question. Suppose Khulna newspaper factory costs 100 million dollars.

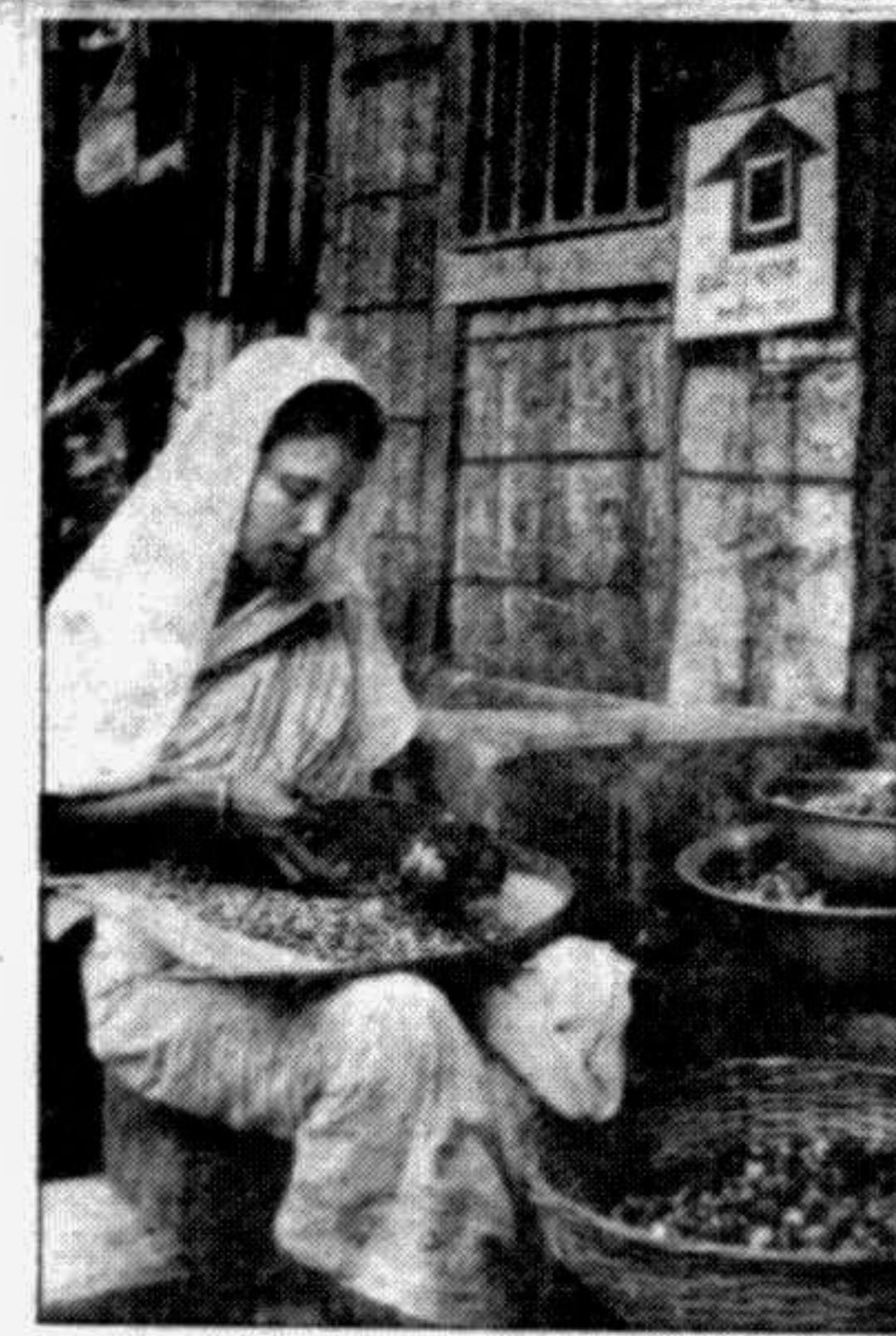
You have two options: create Khulna paper mill industries and employ 5,000 people as staff. They earn their livelihood directly. And say another 5,000 indirectly, carrying things, supplying etc. So you have created 10,000 jobs. If you accept self employment under the category of jobs, Grameen Bank lends out 15 million dollars every month and creates one million jobs, one million families are reached. So if you have created a Grameen Bank in Khulna with 100 million you will probably be reaching out to millions. So you have a case of creating either 10,000 jobs for

for more lungs—one million families, each asking for one new saree every year. You want to build up the base of the economy? This is how to do it. Build buying power.

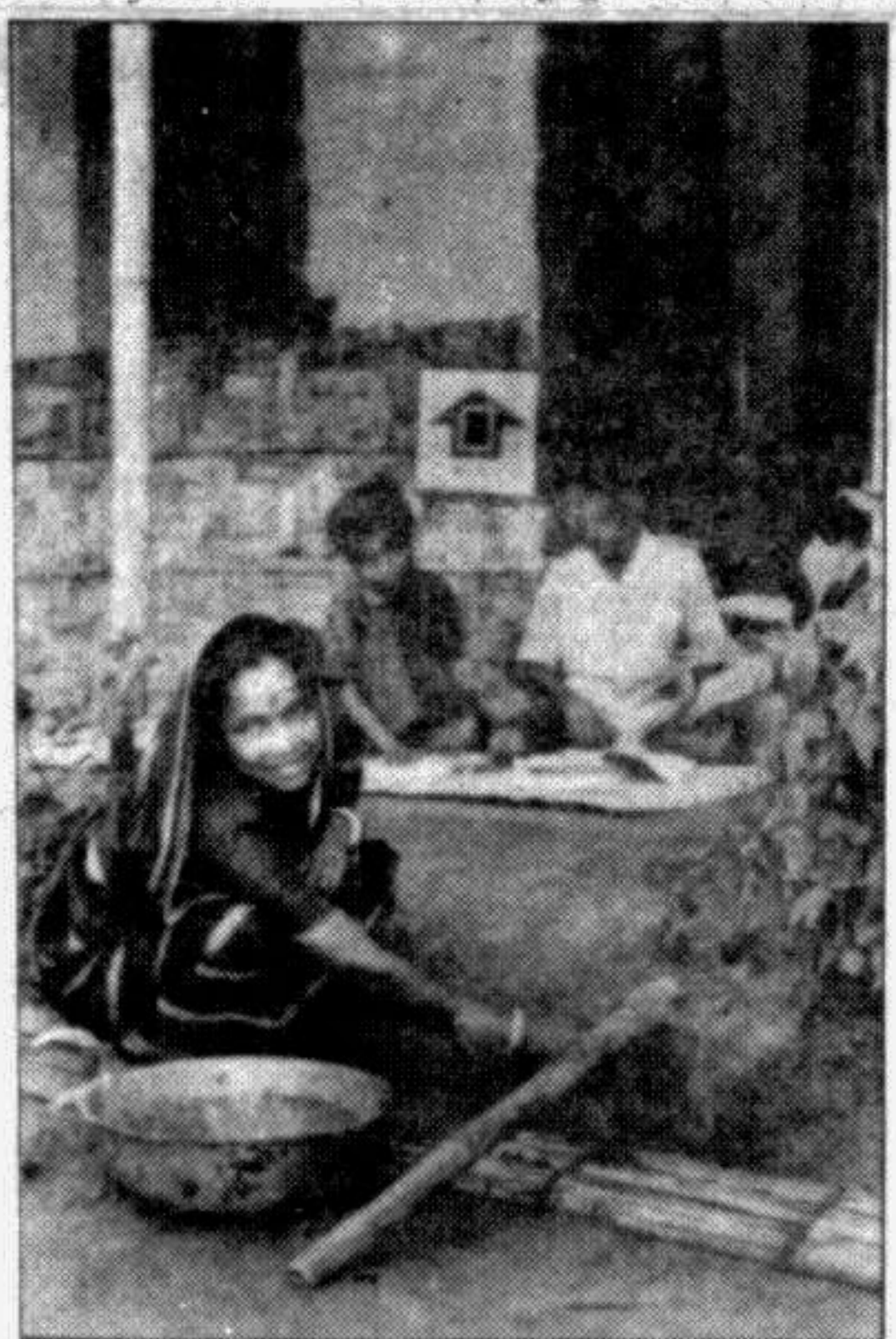
Why are our industries sick today? Why is the inflation rate 4.5 today? Because the people are not buying anything. You have the Finance Minister saying this is good news. To me it is bad news. The economy is in a coma. If people had the purchasing power today, other people would be working to supply basic, simple things such as sarees, lungis, food etc. That is the basis of economy.

DS: But if people have money to buy, what are they going to buy if the economy does not produce?

MY: That's what I'm saying. Today half of the handlooms are dead. OK Let's move to another area of difficulties and problems—the problem of management, of honesty, of chain of command in every industry—identifying why does an industry go sick. Once we



The Grameen Bank logo on their houses: A sense of security.



price. So it also relates to the question of productivity of land and when productivity of land is increased, would it not help the lives of the bottom 50%?

MY: Well these are the sort of make belief stories we have been telling ourselves for years—that somehow the bridge will do all these things. But that bridge never helped the lives of the poor people.

The only thing it did to their lives is that they were pushed out of the land because somebody else found it attractive. They lose their jobs because other people will push their goods. So you are going back to the good old trickle down theory again which was rejected in the US. I am not against the bridge provided you can prove that this is a better way to improve the life of the people.

The terms you used, 'in the long run', is a very critical expression. In the long run, as it is said by economists, you are dead.

Now say you brought a power plant to generate electricity. You claim that if there is electricity there will be industrialization, the more people will be absorbed in the industry. I say industrial jobs do not alleviate poverty. You created another Adamjee which I slaved for over a lifetime and remained poor. I cannot live on my land with my family. I have to live in your busters, in shams, in sickness, that's not poverty alleviation. Creating a job per se is not poverty alleviation.

a 100 million dollars or one million jobs for the same amount. If job creation is your interest.

That's all I'm saying, to weigh alternatives.

DS: I am talking of creating jobs and productivity of the economy in the same branch. I must find a way of marrying two things or maybe more than two things. Creating infrastructure in the country, creating jobs in the country, raising the productivity of the economy. If I have these three pre-requisites, then I believe I'm on the right track for development.

MY: I agree. But the answer is different. Let's take productivity. With 100 million dollars (a false figure), you created a paper mill in Khulna, a sick industry. You have to go on giving subsidies to keep it alive, and you see productivity is a big zero. With 100 million dollars on the other hand, I have reached a million families, releasing the energy of this million. A tiny productivity increase in one million people added together is much larger than whatever

sophisticated equipment you can put up with a 100 million dollars. That one million people, because of an increase in income, will want to have a second lung each year. So they will be asking for another lung each year. So the lung producers will be producing one million extra lungs a year because of the increase in demand.

In your case it was only 10,000 families. In this case it was one million families asking

have tackled those problems and the productivity goes up, then the money you are putting into hands of people—they will be able to buy the goods that we are talking about. Improve on these things go might ahead. But the focus should be on self employment. People can do their own things and release their energy.

DS: From your experience with Grameen Bank would you say the approach should be self employment and that should be the motor?

MY: Yes. Because other things you have complicated, your financial sector is collapsing, your industrial sector is sitting idle. You have problems in management, labor problems, political problems. You have to fix all these things. But at the same time you must focus on addressing the vast human resource we have. They must release their energies and contribute to the economy rather than become a liability. Each tiny bit contributed by the millions becomes a large contribution.

So coming back to resource allocation, if you are really serious about development and if you agree with the definition I gave you—helping the bottom 50%—if I am making any kind of economic plan, where will be my biggest allocation? The entire economic plan should be to change the lives of the bottom 50%. And whatever is needed to be done, if it is setting up a paper mill only then will I set up a paper mill. So the whole plan should be nothing but a poverty alleviation plan.